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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
MONDAY, MARCH 3, 2008

In Today's Papers

President Gul and PM Erdogan Respond to the Allegations Regarding Troop Withdrawal from Iraq
Sabah, Milliyet, Vatan, Radikal, Zaman, Cumhuriyet and others: Speaking at the AKP Ankara Youth Branch meeting on Sunday, Prime Minister Erdogan strongly reacted against allegations that Turkish troops withdrew from northern Iraq upon the order of the United States. He said that the AKP government never takes instructions from anyone. Prior to his departure to Romania, President Gul said he knew the ending date of the operation, and any US influence on that decision was out of the question. The operation was conducted in the way it was planned. Mainstream Vatan says the General Staff responded to criticisms on why troops returned from the operation earlier than expected. All papers carry photographs from the operation which portray challenging geographical conditions. In an interview with mainstream Hurriyet, TGS Chief General Buyukanit said "I can tell you with all my sincerity that the US has no influence whatsoever on our withdrawal. One third of our troops were already pulled back by the time we were meeting with Secretary Gates." Most weekend papers reported General Buyukanit's remarks regarding withdrawal, "Withdrawal from an operation is a more sensitive issue than the start of an operation; we never openly announce the withdrawal time for security reasons." Meanwhile, leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet, mainstream Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah and others report that main opposition party CHP leader Deniz Baykal said about the ending of the cross border operation "the surgery is over but a body part has remained inside the body. The results are pleasing but targets that would provide a lasting solution could not be reached in eight days. There is no problem with the military dimension of the operation however, the political dimension remained insufficient."

Editorial Opinion on CBO and Afterwards "From A War to A Solution"

Hasan Bulent Kahraman, a prominent art critic and free-lance columnist wrote in mainstream Sabah (3/3):

"The army made the right decision to pull out and they did so successfully. Staying in northern Iraq for a long time could have created tension, especially with the US. Now is the time to talk about the post-military operation process. What will be the outcome of this military success? During the recent elections, the government emphasized the importance of resolving the Kurdish problem, which garnered significant electoral support in the southeast. But since the elections, the government appears to be back-pedaling. It is yet unclear whether the Kurdish problem remains a priority for the AKP government. Democratization is the solution to all of our problems. Turkey can sort this out without even introducing a comprehensive package. As we work through the EU reform process, we will reach a solution. The EU harmonization requires a series of legislative changes. Once Turkey sticks with that process, every fundamental issue will be addressed, including the Kurdish problem. Otherwise, Turkey will be drawn into its own vicious cycle. The choice is now up to the government. If the government defines itself by conservatism, we shall not see a solution to our problems. But if it defines itself as democrat, then we can hope for solution."

"The Battlefront is Okay, But Now is the Time for Politics"

Mainstream Milliyet carried this op-ed (3/3):

"There was a communication problem regarding the announcement of last week's withdrawal from northern Iraq. There are still some question marks in public opinion as to whether the Turkish army pulled out due to US pressure. It would be best to conduct a better way of communicating with public opinion regarding the phases of cross border operations. Nevertheless, it is natural to see such debates in open societies. However, those debates should not dilute the success of military operation. Yet, there is another question: will there be another operation in the future? We should break this vicious cycle of violence. The Turkish army achieved the impossible

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with this operation, and now is the time to create a new opportunity out of this military success. The government must start making political, social and cultural efforts to break the vicious cycle of terrorism and military intervention. Now is the time to build peace."

"Let's Call It By Its Correct Name"

Oktay Eksi is senior columnist for Hurriyet and Chairman of Turkey's Press Council. He wrote in mainstream Hurriyet (3/2):

"I am sure that our Foreign Ministry, prime minister, and our president -who each entertained Gates lavishly-- asked the US secretary about the meaning of his remarks prior to his arrival in

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Ankara. In particular, he referred to Turkey as the 'regional Turkish government' in Canberra. Once Gates was in India, he referred to the PKK as 'Kurdish PKK fighters.' He also said, 'the PKK is a Kurdish nationalist armed group that is active in northern Iraq.' This information was not reported in our press. But when we combine this information, we may conclude that Chief of the General Staff Buyukanit was a little too hasty when he said two days ago that he is becoming 'more confident about the sincerity of the United States' in view of its 'cooperation against the PKK.' Indeed, Secretary Gates stepped up the pitch of his warnings from the relatively soft tone in Canberra to his demand that the 'operation end in one or two weeks.' When Secretary Gates were asked whether the Turks got his message, he rudely said, 'I told them four times. I am sure they got it.' After comments such as these, Turkey withdrew our soldiers. It is up to you if you still do not want to call this a disgrace."

Demonstrations Against the Military Operations

Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal and others: Papers report that hundreds of DTP members staged a protest rally in Istanbul against the operation into northern Iraq. DTP deputy Sirri Sakik spoke at the rally and said that the withdrawal is a pleasing development. He also noted that problems cannot be resolved through killing. The protesters clashed with police after protestors shouted pro-PKK slogans; 26 of the protestors were detained. There was also a DTP rally in the southeast province Batman, where 7000 people marched and chanted pro-PKK slogans. During the Batman rally, DTP Batman deputy Ayla

Akat Ata said "the PKK is a fact in Turkey, even if 40,000 more people die."

Meanwhile, liberal Radikal on Sunday began a series detailing suggestions for the composition of a 'political solution' package to the Kurdish issue. Kurdish politicians and intellectuals commented on what they defined as a 'political solution.' Their priorities include free Kurdish broadcasting, Kurdish language education and an amnesty program for the militants.

Troop Deployment at the Border Causes Expectations of New Military Operations

Mainstream Milliyet reports that Turkish troops have been dispatched to the border areas near PKK camps in Haftanin and Hakurk. Noticing the troop activity at the border, the residents of northern Iraq were concerned that the Turkish military would renew its operation. Sunday's Vatan quoted Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin as saying that "Turkish troops can go to northern Iraq once again if necessary."

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

President of the Turkish Bar Association Ozdemir Ozok said the turban problem has pulled Turkey into chaos. He said that the turban has become a symbol of division in Turkey.

More than 100 intellectuals called on the government to undertake
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decisive steps for EU harmonization.

The Turkish General Staff has released 23 new photos of the cross-border operations in northern Iraq.

International News

Israel intensifies its offensive in Gaza as the death toll rises to over 100.

Iran and Iraq issue messages of friendship during Iranian President Ahmedinejad's visit to Baghdad.

Clashes between opposition and security forces in Yerevan kills 9 and leaves many injured.

Greek-Cypriot President Christofias said he is more than ready for a solution in Cyprus, if Turkey is ready for this.

Turkish Cypriot President Mehmet Ali Talat says the elements of Annan plan should be used to work out a solution in Cyprus.

WILSON